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## A NEW APPLICATION OF PSYCHOLOGY

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The word "psychology" is still associated in the minds of many people with speculations about man's destiny and ultimate nature of the sort represented by the works of, say, Noah K. Davis. Those who have kept in touch with its progress, however, are aware that nothing in the past is more thoroughly dead than the old-fashioned "arm-chair" psychology, shaped by individuals to suit their own ideas of what man's mind ought to be like, and taught as an introduction and an annex to philosophy.

Psychology has made a right about face. Instead of beginning with a set of opinions which the facts were twisted to fit, it is devoting itself, in a thoroughly scientific spirit, to the accumulation of verifiable facts. Its methods have come to be those which animate science in any of its departments. Its aim is to understand, and through understanding, to control, human conduct. Its point of view is determined by biology, rather than by philosophy.

It has been evident for some years that psychology was rapidly reaching the point where its accumulation of facts about human nature could be definitely and successfully applied to the shaping of human conduct. In the field of business, for example, progressive advertisers have for some time been calling the psychologist into consultation for the making of laboratory tests of the probable "pulling power" of contemplated advertisements. In the field of education, where valuable psychological facts have been rapidly accumulating (facts which are brought together best in the three volumes of Thorndike's *Educational Psychology*), progress has been made not only in such general matters as methods of teaching, predicting and testing the outcomes of various branches of instruction, formulating methods of economical learning, and so on, but in such special fields as that of testing the mental capacities of children. Several progressive city school systems have added psychologists to their staffs, and the time is not far distant when the mental diagnosis and treatment of school children will be regarded as of as much importance and value as their medical examination. The aid of the psychologist, too, is being invoked in the examination of criminals, in formulating tests of vocational fitness, and so on.

But the most remarkable recent development of applied psychology has been in the military field. The psychologist has been called in by the War Department to help solve certain very definite problems. We

are assembling a great army in which officers and men are quite unknown to each other. Is it possible to devise psychological tests which will, first of all, give the officers "a line on" these men, enable them to tell with a high degree of accuracy who can and who cannot be trusted with tasks involving responsibility and special skill? In the course of months of close contact, the officers would naturally be able to get such information, but only after blunders and delays. Can they be given a reliable idea of the mental strengths and weaknesses of their men at the start? Second, can newly created officers, and candidates for commissions, themselves be rated by some system of tests that will determine their probable fitness for commissions? Third, can the mentally incompetent be weeded out and so either discharged or given simple tasks involving no responsibility? Such were some of the problems in whose solution it was felt psychologists might be able to assist.

Last spring a group of psychologists, meeting for four weeks, went over all the mental tests available for adults, selected certain of them, devised certain others, and finally made up a tentative scheme for the mental examination and classification of recruits, which, after preliminary try-outs and modifications, was tentatively introduced into three army camps and one naval station, the psychologists in charge being given commissions in the Sanitary Corps. The work has proven of such value that the Surgeon-General has recently announced its forthcoming extension to all enlisted men and to all newly appointed officers of the army. Buildings and equipment will be provided at all camps, and a special training course for psychological examiners will be inaugurated at Fort Oglethorpe. The division commander at one of the camps where the tests have been tried writes as follows: "It may be revolutionary, but the psychiatric board's intelligence tests will play a great part in this division. The tests are virtually conclusive; they have proven so in thousands of cases, and men who show a high intelligence rating will be watched closely and will be given every chance of advancement." The Surgeon-General writes, "In the opinion of this office these reports indicate very definitely that the desired results have been achieved; scores of drafted men mentally incompetent have been identified by the psychological tests much earlier in their military careers than would have otherwise occurred. The classification of men

according to mental ability as determined by these examinations, has corresponded, in general, in a very striking way with the estimates, previously made by officers familiar with them, and many instances could be mentioned where men selected for responsible positions solely on their psychological records, had fully justified that selection."

The fact that applied psychology has advanced to a point where it proves of such value in a military way is not only of importance in itself, but is highly significant of the place which it will hold in the future. A recent personal letter to the writer from one of the ablest of American psychologists, contains an interesting suggestion. He says, "In my judgment the time is coming when a good deal more attention will be given to fitting college courses to individual college men than has been the case in the past, at least I hope that things will develop in that way. If that is the case, all this military experience should contribute very much toward the testing out of applicants for admission to college and Freshmen. If anything worth while can be shown, such tests will be immensely useful."

Tests have been available for a number of years which have made it possible to estimate with a high degree of accuracy the intelligence of children of the usual elementary school ages. When the psychological tests now in use in the army become available for general use after the war, there is every reason to expect that reliable judgments of the intelligence of high school and college students can be found on the basis of their application, and that the publicity now being given to the fact that mental testing is a worth while thing will make the psychologist a familiar figure in our school systems.

## EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CONTROL

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### III

Two propositions are now before us. The first, outlined in the first paper of this series, is that man must come to think about social phenomena as he has come to think about nature—in terms of fact and law—that he must strive to understand, and systematically to control, social phenomena. The second proposition, to which the second paper was devoted, is that the machinery which must be relied on to bring about systematic social control is that of education. We must learn to think of education as a means for reaching desired social ends, not as a process whereby certain individuals are given advantage over others in the struggle for existence.

Now it is evidently not the business of the public school to help in formulating social ends, to assist constructively in the explaining of social phenomena. This is the business of the statesmen and the expert, and very much the business of higher education.

A little analysis will make clear the task which the elementary, and especially the secondary, school must perform in this respect. The society in which we live is ruled, in the last analysis, by organized public opinion. Against its force no individual, or group of individuals can for long stand out. It is this fact which makes us a democracy, and which makes England and France, in spite of differences in the machinery of government, equally democracies. This is the fundamental line of cleavage between the Allies and the Central Powers. These facts are obvious, but it is always necessary to recall them. The sort of world for which we are fighting, and in the necessity for which we passionately believe, is a world in which organized public opinion shall prevail.

But public opinion has its tragedies as well as its triumphs. Like a harmful electric current, it is equally potent for destruction and for construction. The belief that "the voice of the people is the voice of God" is one of those dangerous half-truths, full belief in which may wreck individuals and nations. It was public opinion which crucified Christ.

We have heard many times of late that it is not enough to make the world safe for democracy; that democracy must be made safe for the world. Unintelligent democracy can menace the future of civilization quite as seriously as autocracy.

What public education can and must do if democracy is permanently to prevail, is to make public opinion intelligent. Stated in this general fashion, the thesis is so self-evident that it has been one of the constantly recurring arguments for public education everywhere. Every teacher holds to it as a part of his educational creed. But, like many other general and equally self-evident truths, its implications have not been developed in practice. Most of us have held to the comfortable assumption that intelligent public opinion could be secured by developing the "general intelligence" of individuals. That is, we have seemingly agreed that the "mental training" to be derived from the study of mathematics, language, and science, could somehow be relied on to inject itself into a citizen's reactions toward matters of public moment. History, learned from a text, with no background, no understanding of the social and economic forces which shaped the rise and fall of nations, has been, somewhat mysteriously, but none the less really, supposed to prepare for citizenship. Neither here nor in the